THEORY AND PRACTICE OF HINDU RITUAL

Vol. 2

Yajña



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THE VEDIC BACKGROUND[1]

Definition of "Veda"

The word 'Veda' (cognate with 'video' in Latin, 'Vede' in old Slavic and 'Wessen' in German) is derived variously from the roots, 'vid' meaning 'to know', and 'vidlṛ' - 'to obtain'. The obtainment referred to is the pursuit and fulfilment of the three values in life, righteousness (**dharma)**, material well-being (**artha)** and enjoyment of sensual pleasures (**kāma**), together known as the *'trivarga'* or the three objectives of human aspiration (**puruṣārtha**). To this group of three was later added 'Liberation' (**mokṣa**), which in effect was the other polarity of the group of three, and hence was described as *'apa-varga'* ("outside the group").

Definition of "Dharma"

Dharma (from the root *dhṛ***,** which means 'to support', 'to prop up') is the individual and collective conduct that is regarded by common consensus as ideal and imperative.

It provides direction to our actions, framework for the values we must adopt and nurture, and goals to be achieved within the limits set by the society. This is what is meant by the Pūrva-Mimāmsa definition of dharma as *'codanā-lakṣaṇārtha'*; and by the explanation that it contributes to social welfare as well as Liberation (*'yatobhyudaya-nihśreyasa-siddhiḥ*).

Thus the Vedic tradition aims at instructing the people about the proper conduct (dharma).

Ṛta — The Universal Law

Ṛta (cognate with Greek *'arti'*, Latin *'artus'*, and German *'Recht'* and the English *'right'*) signifies the eternal and immutable, universal and existential order and law, which needs to be reflected in each individual life as well as in the community.

Violation of *'ṛta'* is termed — *enas, anṛta, durita* and is often translated as "sin". Ṛta is the underlying foundation of life, for leading a life in conformity with *'ṛta'* would be the way to overcome suffering and rebirth.

The *'ṛta'* as the 'right' way of life was accomplished by **yajña**.

The yajña was the way to purify and harmonise not only the individual but the environment as well, it includes prayers and purifications, consecrations and empowerments.

The yajña as the *'ṛta'* in action was a human responsibility: it was meant to unfold the spiritual potential in the human being and also to secure prosperity and welfare.

The Vedic tradition (the Mahāyāna) was from early times approached by some in terms of:—

karma-khāṇḍa — the way of life that ensures prosperity and welfare

jñāna-khāṇḍa — the wisdom that liberates.

[1] Adapted from Principles of Yajña Vidhi by Prof. S.K. Ramachandra Rao.

YAJÑA - SYMBOL & RITE

Terms

'**yajña**', derived from the root *'yaja'* and has several closely related meanings:— adoration, worship, prayer, praise, offering, presentation, oblation, consecration and sacrifice.

'yāga' means nothing more than a sacrificial rite where offerings are made *('ijyate havir dīyate atra').*

Synonymous expressions emphasising the aspect of offering are:—	*sava, makha, iṣṭi, savana* & *homa*;
Expressions emphasising invocation of the gods *('ijyante devata atra')*	*āhava*, and *havana*;

'adhvara' means a sacrifice, where violence is avoided *(a-dhvara, hiṁsā-karma).*

'Yajña'[2] is a word which evokes many images, and is rich in symbolic associations. It suggests the role of divinity not only in human affairs but in the very creation of the world. It is an expedient invented by the gods themselves for projecting all things and beings in the world, and adopted by human beings for securing their wealth and welfare. It is a sacred 'rite' inherent in all creation, and natural to man.

And it is not *merely* a rite; it is also an attitude, a resolve, a device, an initiation, an instrument and an act. It involves the whole being of the person who is engaged in the act, and transforms his psycho-physical form into a vehicle of divinity.

> Yajña also connotes three acts:—
>
> *yajana* — oblation, offering, giving
> *yācana* — requesting, receiving
> *yujana* — creating harmony and balance – rectification of ṛta.

All sacrifices have three aspects: —

- **uddeśa** (intention or direction), viz. the god for whom the sacrifice is meant;
- **tyāga** (what is given up); viz. the offerings or the havis; and
- **prakṣepa** (the prescribed spot or particular fire where the offerings are delivered).

❖ The Purpose of Yajña

In Śukla Yajur Veda-Saṁhita (chapter 18;1;2 and 6) there is a detailed account of the various benefits that result from the performance of a sacrifice (*yajñena kalpantām*). Among such benefits are abundance of food (*vāja*), wealth (*prasava*), efficiency in work (*prayati*), mental acuity (*dhiti*), enlightenment (*jyoti*), physical vigour (*ojas*), longevity (*dirghāyu*), health (*anāmaya*), tranquility (*śarma*), fearlessness (*abhaya*), friendship (*anamitram*), and sound sleep (*sukham śayanam*). The sacrificer prays that his life may become fulfilled by the sacrifice that he performs (ibid 9, 21 *'ayur yajñena kalpatam'*).

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[2] Yajña as a rite is defined as offering oblations in the name of gods *('devatoddeśena havis-tyagaḥ')* while specific mantras are being recited *(samantraka-dravya-tyāga)*. Jaiminiya-sūtra (4;2;;27) explains that it is an act which is of the nature of giving up of articles for the sake of pleasing the gods *(devatoddeśyaka-dravya-tyāga-rūpa-kriyā')*. The important sequence in a yajña is the offering of oblations into the fire *('haviḥ-prakṣepātmaka vyāpāraḥ)*.

The ostensible goal of the yajña is the attainment of *'svarga'* (heavens, bliss), by means of the unprecedented meritorious potency (*apūrva* - 'never-before') that is acquired through the performance of the yajña.

In the injunction — m*darśapūrṇamāsābhyāṁ svarga-kāmo yajeta*

Bhaṭṭa-Kumārila's commentary — Tup-ṭīkā (6,1,1) explains that **svarga** is that which an individual likes most ardently —*('ekasya prītiḥ svarga-śabda-vācyā').* It does not, however, refer to the things that cause happiness or liking (*prītimad-dravya*) but to beatitude itself.

The Symbolism

We read in Rig-Veda (10, 90, 16, the celebrated Puruṣa-sūkta) that the gods (viz. the beings of light — *devāḥ*) who were first created performed a sacrifice (through their will and contemplation) and worshipped the sacrifice itself (viz. Viṣṇu in the form of yajña). They offered the Supreme Being himself as an oblation and thus performed the first of the sacrifices *('yat puruṣena haviṣa deva yajñam atanvata').*

The sacrifice was for them an instrument as well as their objective *(yajñena yajñam ayajanta devah');* and out of this primordial sacrifice, the first principles of life were formed *('tāni dharmāni prathamānyāsan).*

Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa (11:1:8:3) has a related imagery; the gods offered sacrifice to secure the favour of Prajāpati, the creator; and Prajāpati, pleased with their devotion offered himself as a sacrifice to them. This is how Prajāpati became the yajña, creating a model of himself.

The concept of sacrifice is based upon self-sacrifice; giving oneself up, but for purposes of more effective re-generation. We have in the same text another account (3;9;4;23) explaining the significance of yajña; —

> "They (the priests) kill during the sequence of crushing (*abhiśava*), and create again during the subsequent sequence. While it is being destroyed, it is born again, and this is yajña."

There is a story in Kālika-Purāṇa (chapter 30), which describes the creation of the world from the body of Viṣṇu as *Yajña-varāha* (the primeval boar symbolising sacrifice). After the earth was recovered from the depths of the waters by Varāha incarnation of Viṣṇu, the gigantic body of the divine rescuer had to be disposed of. Śiva assumed the form of Śarabha and undertook to strike at it, cutting it into pieces. Yajña emerged from the body of the Bhū-varāha. As soon as Siva tore the body of Varāha, the gods Brahma, Viṣṇu, Siva and others with all their attendants, carried the body (which had fallen into the waters) into the sky, and there Viṣṇu cut the body into pieces by his discus. From the joints of the organs of the body, separate yajñas flashed forth.

Jyotiṣṭoma emerged from the joint between the eyebrows and the snout, *Agniṣṭoma* from the joint between the jaws and the ears; *Vrātyaṣṭoma* from the meeting place between the eyes and eyebrows; *Paunarbhavaṣṭoma* from the spot where the snout meets the lips; *Vṛddhaṣṭoma* and *Brhaṣṭoma* from the root of the tongue; *Atirātra* from under the tongue; the five great yajñas of the householder (*pañca-mahā-yajña*) from the neck-joint; *Aśvamedha, Mahā-medha, Puruṣa-medha* and all other sacrifices which involve violence from the foot-joints; *Rājasūya, Kāriśa, Vājapeya* and the *Graha-yajñas* — from the hind parts; *Pratiṣṭarga-yajña*, *Dāna-śrāddha* and *Sāvitri-yajña* from the joints in the area of the heart; *Prāyaścitta-yajña* from the joints in the penis region; *Rākṣasa-satra, Sarpa-satra, Go-medha* and all the *abhicārika* (infernal) rites from the hooves of the feet; *Mayeṣṭi, Parameṣṭi* and all other annual and occasional yajñas from the tail-joint; and so on. In all, one thousand and eight yajñas- were thus produced.

Not only the different yajñas, but the various vessels and implements, articles of oblation and structural details were also produced from the dismembered carcass of Varāha; the ladle known as *sruk* from the snout, another variety of ladle known as *sruva* from the nostrils, *Prāgvaṁsa* from the neck region, the sacrificial stake (*yūpa*) from the tusks, the *kuśa-grass* from the hair, the *Puroḍāśa-cake* from the brain, *Karṣu* from the two eyes, and *yajña-ketu* from the hoof.



The middle portion of the animal's body became the sacrificial altar (*vedi*); the back of Varāha changed into the shed for the performance of sacrifice (*yajñālaya*); the penis got converted into the fire-pit (*kuṇḍa*); and from the heart of Varāha issued forth the *yajña* (*'hṛtpadmād yajña eva ca'*).

The story continues to narrate that on the same occasion, three associates of Varāha were also killed: Suvṛtta, Kaṇaka and Ghora. Brahma the Creator produced the fire known as **Dakṣināgni** from the body of Suvṛtta, Viṣṇu, the Preserver the fire called **Gārhapatyāgni** from Kaṇaka's body, and Siva the Destroyer the fire **āhavanīyāgni** from the body of Ghora. These three fires fill the entire universe *(etais tribhiḥ jagat vyāptam);* all the worlds come out of them *(trimūlam sakalam jagat);* and where the three fires are tended, all the gods abide *('yatra trayam etat nityam, tiṣṭanti samasta devatās tatra').* An important detail of the legend is that the sacrifice was an act of self-immolation on the part of Viṣṇu, who is the creator as well as the preserver.

After the Goddess Earth (*Bhūdevī*) was recovered from the clutches of the demons of the waters, Varāha in his beastly nature began copulating with her, thus causing untold harm to all creation. Viṣṇu thereupon resolved to give up this incarnation *('varāham kāyam tyaktum icchāmi').* As a preparation for winding up the Varāha incarnation, Viṣṇu engaged himself in deep contemplation, as a result of which the radiance and might of Varāha began to be withdrawn in slow measure.

Viṣṇu had thus to prevail over one of his own incarnations and invite Siva the destroyer to smite his own body (as Varāha incarnation). Further, he dismembered his own body into fragments by his own discus, as a result of which act of primal sacrifice the other sacrifices which human beings perform came into being. This account of how Varāha's body was transformed into a yajña *('yajña-varāhasya śarīram yajñatām agāt')* has been introduced by the claim that all the gods abide in yajña, that all things in the world are founded upon yajña, and that it is by yajña that the firmament is borne and the people are preserved.

It also describes the yajña which was created by Prajāpati or the creator *('prajāpatir yajñam atanuta', 18, 3, 41)* as the first to come into existence and as continuing for all time *('sa yajña prathamo bhuto bhavyo ajāyata', 13, 2, 55),* and as the source for all things in the universe.

The entire earth was the sacrificial altar, and the directions were the boundary sticks *('urvīr āsan paridhayo vedir bhūmir akalpayat', 13, 1).* The priest who sacrifices must think of the earth itself as the first faggot that is put into the fire, the heavens as the second faggot, and the mid-regions as the third; with these faggots, girdle, toil and austerity he sustains the worlds (9, 5, 4).

The yajña that the human beings are required to perform is the re-enactment of the cosmic creation and regeneration by self-sacrifice and dismemberment of ones own constitution. It assumes the form of a rite which is highly symbolic. While yajña is described as a method of worshipping the gods, yajña is itself regarded as a god in Yajur Veda (16;1;31); it eliminates all sins and purifies the performer of the yajña; it bestows on him strength, vigour and agility by sanctifying the food that he eats and the water that he drinks (ibid, 1, 20); it causes health, happiness and wealth.

All types of yajña involve the installation, invocation, and worship of Agni, the fire god. The relevance of Agni is based on the assumption of his being the leader of all the gods *('agnir vai devānām mukham'),* the fore-runner *('agranir bhavati', Nirukta, 7;14;4)* and the first divinity to arrive in sacrifices *('agram yajñeṣu praṇīyate').*

Agni — Fire



The very first mantra in Rig-Veda is in adoration of Agni, who is described as 'the god of the sacrifice' *('yajñasya devam')* and as one who readily secures the welfare of all of us *('puro-hitam').* All the gods come to the place of sacrifice only in the form of Agni; hence the saying that Agni is all the gods *('agnis sarva devatāḥ').*

Agni was brought from the high heavens to the earth, and he is hidden in the earth; he is the inner controller of all things; and indeed he becomes the visible god when the sacred fire (*yājakāgni*) is set up on the sacrificial platform (*vedi*). Agni was one of the high gods of the Vedic pantheon along with Varuna and Indra.

In the sacrifice, it is said that the Agni kindles the Agni (Rig-Veda;1;12;6, *'agnināgnis samiddhyate'*), which is symbolically enacted in kindling the **āhavanīya**-fire from the **gārhapatya**-fire.

Agni is all-pervading and ever present; he has three principal forms, according to Rig-Veda *(1, 95, 3, 'trīni jānā pari-bhuṣaty asya'):—*

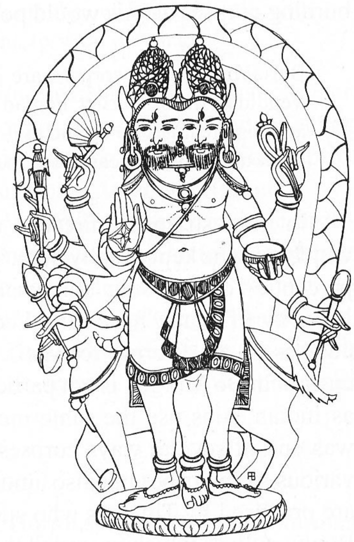
- *baḍavānala* — the fire in the centre of the earth,
- *āditya* — the Sun in space
- *vidyutagni* — lightning in the atmospheric-region.

The Ten Forms of Agni

There are 10 forms of Agni — 5 natural and 5 ritual.

1. Agni as the common earthly fire (*laukika agni*).
2. Indra (or Vayu) the power of the lightning the source of conflagrations and forest fires (*dāvāgni*)
3. Sūrya as the celestial fire (*divya-agni*)
4. *Vaiśvānara* — the inner power of digestion which makes it possible for all living things to ingest and digest food. It is the support of life.

5. The fire of total destruction — Agn's most fearful form and remains hidden under the sea ever ready to destroy the planet. *bāḍava-agni* or vāḍava ("to dive"). It lies dormant in the mouth of a volcano.
6. *Brahma-agni* — fire-of-the-immensity. This fire is born when the churning of the fire-sticks (araṇi) occurs.
7. *prajāpatya-agni* — fire-of-the-lord-of-progeny. This fire is given to the brahmacāri when he is invested with the sacred thread and has to offer daily samidha-dānam.
8. The fire of total destruction — Agn's most fearful form and remains hidden under the sea ever ready to destroy the planet. *bāḍava-agni* or vāḍava ("to dive"). It lies dormant in the mouth of a volcano.
9. *Brahma-agni* — fire-of-the-immensity. This fire is born when the churning of the fire-sticks (araṇi) occurs.



10. *prajāpatya-agni* — fire-of-the-lord-of-progeny. This fire is given to the brahmacāri when he is invested with the sacred thread and has to offer daily samidha-dānam
11. *gārhapatya-agni* — fire-of-the-housholder. This is the fire which is kindled at the time of marriage and brought home to be worshipped every day for the rest of one's life.
12. *dakṣiṇā-agni* — fire-of-the-ancestors. This is the fire into which offerings are made to the ancestors and rituals of excorcism (*abhicāra-yajña*) are performed.
13. *kravyāda-agni* — fire-of-the-cremation. Is lit when the body is cremated — it should always be respected but avoided.

The Five types of Vedic fires — pañca mahāgni

1. **gārhapatya;** established in the west of the yāga-śāla.
2. **daksināgni [**anvāhārya-pacana**]** established in the south
3. **agnīdhrīya** (*optional*)
4. **āvasathya;** established in the north.
5. **āhavanīya;** established in the east.

The *gārhapatya* is to kept alive always by the agnihotrin, and the others are kindled by transference when the occasion arises.

The Fire Hearths (Kuṇḍas)

Kuṇḍas come in various shapes and sizes depending on the ritual that is being performed.

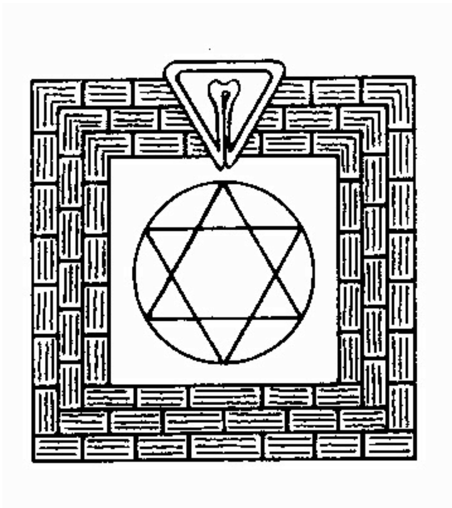
In some temples a designated sacrificial hall (yāga-śālā) is built in which a permanent brick kuṇḍa is constructed. For domestic use usually a copper moveable kuṇḍa is in vogue. If a copper kuṇḍa is unavailable one may use a sthaṇḍila which is a sand altar – constructed either in the courtyard or home – one may use a board or a metal tray upon which sand has been spread.





In most large scale Vedic Yajñas three brick kuṇḍas are required:—

1. The first one (in the west) for the **gārhapatya**-fire which is established by the friction of the fire-sticks from the aśvattha or śami trees:
2. the second one (in the east) for the **āhavaniya-fire**, which is kindled from the **gārhapatya**-fire;
3. the third one (in the south) for the **dakṣināgni**, which is also kindled from the gārhapatya- fire (according to Sankhayāna-sūtra).



According to the prescription of the śulba-sūtra , the kuṇḍa for the **gārhapatya**-fire must be circular in shape, the **āvahanīya** — square, and the **dakṣināgni** — half-moon shaped (ardha-chandra, or of the form of the bow, dhanurākṛti) or of the shape of a winnow-basket (śūrpa).

1. The **gārhapatya**	2. The **āhavanīya**-	3. The **dakṣināgni**
Round	Square	Half-circle/or shurpa
The domestic fire	Sun (sūrya)	wind-god (Vāyu — cosmic life force) or Moon (Soma)
human beings	The gods	The manes (pitṛ) and elementals

Agni-manthana — The Kindling of the sacred Fire



The fire for the Vedic sacrificial purpose is best produced by churning (*agni-manthana*) using the fire sticks (*araṇi*) made from trees like śami and aśvattha. (Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa, 1;1;9;1)

One araṇi is placed above the other, and churned by using a rope (*rasanā*). The lower araṇi (*ādhāra-araṇi*) is called Urvaśī (a nymph) and the stick which is on top (uttara-araṇi) is called Purūravas (Indra).

Samidhas — Faggots

Among the trees that are permitted for the purpose of providing faggots (*samidha*) for kindling and maintaining the fire are khadira, palāśa, aśvattha, nygrodha, śami and āmra (mango). But in practice any wood from local trees can be used.

Offerings

According to the substances offered, sacrifices are sometimes divided into vegetable and animal sacrifices.

Vegetable Substances		Animal Substances	
taṇḍūlaḥ	raw rice	*payaḥ (kṣīra)*	milk
piṣṭāni	flour	*dadhi (sarpi)*	yoghurt
phalīkaraṇāḥ	husk	*ājyam*	Ghee (goat's)
puroḍāśaḥ	cakes	*ghṛtam*	Ghee (cow's)
odanaḥ	cooked rice	*amikṣā*	curds
yavāgūḥ	rice gruel	*vapā*	omentum
pṛthukāḥ	rice boiled and pressed	*tvacaḥ*	skin
lājāḥ	popped rice	*māṁsam*	flesh
dhānāḥ	parched barley	*lohitam*	blood
caru	Boiled rice/barley	*vājinam*	whey

Soma



Soma, the juice of which is one of the principle things offered in many yajñas is a creeper (valli), the precise identity of which is uncertain; it is usually taken to be *Sarcostemma viminale* or *intermedium*, and its Vedic description is that it is dark in colour (*syāmalābha*), leafless (*niṣpatra*), milky (*kṣīriṇī*) fleshy on surface (*māṁsula*) and sour to taste.

It as a twisting semi-shrub with a series of leafless shoots which contain an acidulous milky juice. It symbolises the nectar in the moon (celestial moon, in contradistinction to the terrestrial moon,

which provides youth, health and strength. It is also described as the 'dew of the dawn ' ('Soma moves at the head of the dawns').



It is an hallucinogen, which is said to inspire the sages to compose hymns and provide stimulation generally. But the Vedic references regard it as a god in its own right, and as the monarch (*rāja*).

Preparation of soma during the sacrifice is an elaborate ritual. The sequence begins with the initial act of procuring the soma-creepers from the vendors who bring it from mountains and forests — known as **soma-vikrayaṇa**. This is followed by the ceremonial bringing of soma to the yāga-śāla (**soma-praṇayana**). The juice is then extracted from the plant with elaborate rituals and chants and then offered into the sacred fire, the remainder is drunk by the priests, first by the hotri and then by the others. It is usual for puroḍāśa cakes and caru to be offered as oblation along with soma. In some sacrifices, another intoxicating drink called sura is used.

It is usual for most sacrifices to involve the offering as oblation and subsequent partaking by the priests of the puroḍāśa cakes (*puroḍāśa-bhakṣaṇa*) and soma-juice (*soma-pāna*), and the ceremonial sacrifice of an animal (*paśvālambhana*). Such public sacrifices became in due course less popular and fell into desuetude, giving way to the domestic sacrifices which were much simpler, being little more than a simple fire-sacrifice (**Agni-hotra**).

The Five Great Sacrifices

There are five daily 'great' sacrifices (*pañca-mahā-yajña*) prescribed for a householder;

1. **brahma-yajña** (studying and teaching the Scriptures),
2. **pitr-yajña** (libations for the manes),
3. **deva-yajña** (fire-ritual or agni-hotra),
4. **bhūta-yajña** (feeding animals and birds, caring for the environment) and
5. **manuṣya-yajña** (honouring the guests and visitors).

The concept of yajña was widened in scope, and the sacrificial ritual of the Vedic times survived in the form of a 'homa' or 'havan' that the householder performed as a part of the daily deva-yajña. Nowadays very few householders continue with this practice.



Very few of the elaborate and expensive sacrifices prescribed in Yajur Veda were performed even in the medieval period; and even fewer still are performed in our day.

The Officiating Priests

Specialists of the three (and later four) Vedic Saṁhitas function as officiating priests, called **ṛtviks** because they propitiate the gods ceremonially *(ṛtau yajati*) and they are chosen by the sponsors the sacrifice (*yajamāna*). The priests are paid in cash or kind (*dakṣina*) at the end; they are in this sense, and in this sense alone, 'hired'. But their decision on all major and minor details are supreme and unquestioned. They act independently, although each one of them has his tradition-bound role to play and co-operates with others, so that the ritual progresses in the prescribed manner. The conduct of a sacrifice is compared in Rig-Veda (2, 5, 4) to the natural growth of tree with branches appearing one after another according to a pre-ordained order (*'vaya ivānurohate'*).

The four classes of priests (ṛtviks):

1. The **adhvaryu** is the chief priest who is directly responsible for the conduct of the sacrifice (*'adhvaram yunakti'*). He belongs to the Yajur Veda and attends to all details of the sacrifice. He is the priest who actually offers oblations in the fire. He prompts the hotṛ and the udgātṛ to recite or chant their portions by means of the **praiśa** mantras,

His assistants are known as *prati-prasthātṛ, neṣṭṛ* and *unnetṛ*.

2. The **hotṛ** (the "invoker") who chants hymns (called Śatras) from the Rig-Vedic Saṁhitas suitable to the occasion (like *prātar-anuvāka*, *yājyā-puronuvākya* etc.), when called upon to do so by the chief priest, adhvaryu.

He has three assistant priests known as *maitra-varuṇa, acchāvāka* and *grāvastut.*

These priests are required only to recite the necessary mantras, which should accompany the acts of the chief priest, adhvaryu; they do not offer oblations into the fire themselves.

3. The **udgātṛ** (the priest who raises his voice and sings) is a specialist in Sāma-Veda, whose function is to chant the Sāman hymns (called Stotras) during the sacrifice when gods have to be invoked. There can be no sacrifice without the singing of Sāma hymns *('ayajño vā eṣa yo-asāma').*

His assistants are *prastotṛ, prati-hartṛ* and *subrahmaṇya*.

4. The fourth priest is known as **Brahmā**, and his role is as the master of ceremonies. Some (e.g. Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa 11;5;5;8) hold that he must be well versed in all the three Vedas, and ensure that everything is done correctly. Others view him as a specialist in Atharva-Veda.

While the others perform the sacrifice in actuality; he performs the sacrifice mentally. His responsibility is to see that no commissions, omissions or errors occur in the chanting (*mantra*) or in the performance of rituals (*tantra*). He corrects the mistakes whenever they are made and suggests the rites of expiation (*prāyaścitta*) immediately.

His assistants are:— *agnīt* (or *agnīdra* whose job is to tend the sacrificial fire and keep them continually burning), *potṛ* (who attends to the errors and to their rectification) and *Brāhmaṇācchaṁsi* (who takes care of the sacrificial vessels & implements).

Ritvig-varaṇa (The selection of the priests)

Qualifications;

The priests should be selected according to the degree to which they possess the following qualifications:—

1. Learning — the priests should be tested for their learning.[3]

2. Eloquence — the priest should be able to explain the ritual and direct the proceedings in a lucid manner.

3. Youth — Some of the yajñas are extremely taxing and so a younger healthy priest is preferred to an old one.

4. Good conduct — the better a priest is in personal good conduct and adherence to the Dharma the more preferred he is.

Disqualification;

1. Deformed or deficient limbs
2. Chronic illness

Āpastamba lays down that pious Brāhmaṇas who are descendants of respected sages and who are knowledgeable with regard to the sacrifice must be chosen. Further, they must be experts in their respective Vedas, and must be able to recite or sing the hymns clearly and correctly; their voice must be pleasant and vigorous. They must neither be youngsters nor very old. They must be free from physical defects and diseases.

Four or sixteen such ṛtviks are selected. And the yajamāna in the soma-yāga sends a messenger (called *soma-pravāka*) to bring them to the place of sacrifice, and as soon as they arrive they are honoured with *madhuparka* (a mixture of honey, yoghurt and ghee). The yajamāna should mentally chant a hymn in which the *hotṛ* is identified with Agni (Fire god), the *adhvaryu* with āditya (Sun god), the *udgātṛ* with Parjanya (Rain god) and the *brahmā* with Candrama Moon god), before he recites the mantra beginning with 'asau-mānuṣah'.

agnirme hotā'dityo me'dhvaryuścandramā me brāhmā parjanyo ma udgātā ||

The Yajamāna — The Host of the Yajña

In Vedic times only those who had undergone the rite of initiation (*upanayana*) and were householders (i.e. married) were entitled to commission yajñas. This meant members of the three varṇas — Brahmins, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas only but we find in practice it was mainly kṣatriyas of the ruling class and wealthy merchants who actually commissioned them because of the financial cost involved. Some of the texts mention the giving away of 100 cows which in modern terms would amount to about $100,000 in fees alone!

Nowadays every one and any one can commission a yajña to be performed. But all gṛhya yajñas require the yajamāna to be married.

If the yajamāna has undergone the sacrament of upanayana and has some knowledge of Sanskrit then he will be required to repeat the mantras after the priests, otherwise at the beginning of the yajña the yajamāna gives the power of attorney to the chief priest who does the entire ritual on his behalf.

The wife of the yajamāna (yajamāna-patnī) always sits to his right during the yajña and for the blessings stands to his left.

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[3] The yajamāna should not choose a priest who is unlearned in the Veda nor one who haggles about his fee.— Āpastambha Smṛti ii;5;10;8

Female Priests

Although female priests are not expressly mentioned in the gṛhya sūtras there are hints that they could if they wanted to.

P.V. Kane, in the *History of Dharmasastra,* afforded this topic three-and-a-half pages. Writes Kane: "An interesting question is whether women ever had *upanayana* performed, or whether they had to wear the sacred thread. *Harita Dharmasutra,* as quoted in the *Smriti-candrika,* says, 'There are two sorts of women. Those who are *bramavadinis* (students of sacred lore) and those that are *sadyovadhus* (who marry straightaway). Out of these, *brahmavadinis* have to go through *upanayana,* keeping fire, *Vedic* study and begging in one's house (under the parents' roof). But in the case of *sadyovadhus,* when their marriage is drawing near, the mere ceremony of *upanayana* should somehow be performed and then their marriage should be celebrated. Therefore bramavadini women had *upanayana* performed in the eighth year from conception, then studied Vedic lore and finished student-hood at the age of puberty."



Nowadays there are a number of ashrams in Pune and Banares that are training young women to become priests and they are quite popular among the devotees. (Vide picture — Pt. Chitra Lele)

There are three possible objections to female priests:—

Objection	Solution
1. Menstruation — she will be out of commission during her period which will lead to inconvenience to the yajamānas who often need to book months in advance.	Women generally know when they are due and the organized priestess will ensure that she does not take any bookings closs to those dates.
2. Contact with males — she will have to touch the male-yajamāna when she ties the *kankanam* (protective thread) to his wrist during ceremonies.	She can tie the thread to the wife's hand and she can tie it for her husband. (Women already tie it for their brothers on *Rakṣa-bandhana* day)
3. She will not be allowed to receive dakṣiṇa or dāna from the yajamāna as receipt of gifts from a married man would constitute an act of adultery.	She can receive the dānam or dakṣiṇa from the hands of the wife of the yajamāna.

TYPES OF VEDIC YAJÑAS

There are a number of variations in the classification of Vedic Yajñas by the various authorities. The Vedic sacrifices can be classified into three broad types according to those performed by the individual for himself, community sacrifices involving all members of a particular community and those of national import affecting the whole nation.

1. Grihya Sacrifices — Domestic Rituals.

These are quite simple and involve oblations of boiled rice (*caru*) offered into the household fire (*gṛhyāgni*) — hence also called *pāka-yajñas* (sacrifices of cooked food)

According to Apastamba-Paribhāṣa-sūtra the 7 varieties of gṛhya-yajñas are;

- *aupāsana-homa* — daily offerings into the domestic fires
- *vaiśvadeva* — daily offerings of cooked rice to various deities.
- *pārvana* — monthly offerings
- *aṣṭaka* — Performed for the ancestors in the Kṛṣṇa pakṣa aṣṭami and navami in the month of Magha.
- *māsi-śrāddha* — This is the prototype (*prakṛti*) for all the other śrāddhas for the manes performed every month on amāvāsya (new moon).
- *sarpa-bali* — This is the sthāli-pāka ceremony in the month of śrāvana (July/August) – performed after sunset. Also called sarpa-bali. It is continued every night until the pūrṇimā of Agrahāyaṇa (Dec/Jan). Removes the curse of infertility.
- *īśāna-bali* — Performed for Rudra on the purṇimā of Caitra at the cross-roads at night.

Other texts (like Gautama-Dharma-sūtra, 1;8;10) mention *aṣṭaka, pārvana, māsi-śrāddha, śrāvani, āgrahāyaṇī, caitrī* and *aśvayuji* as the seven **saṁsthās** (or kinds) of this yajña.

The **darvi-homas** are minor varieties where the offerings are made with mantras ending with 'svāhā', without employing the invocations and eulogies of gods (known as yājya—puronuvākya)

2. Śrauta Sacrifices — Community Rituals

The Śrauta-yajñas are of two major kinds: **havir-yajñas** and **soma-yajñas**

In **havir-yajñas** the oblations are clarified butter (*ājya*), boiled preparations of rice, barley or wheat (*caru*), the faggots of selected trees (*samidha*) etc.,

In the **soma-yajñas** the oblation is the soma-juice, which is also drunk later by the yajamāna and the ṛtviks.

Also included in this category are:—

(a) *pitru yajña;* — funeral sacrifices (b) *bṛhaspati-sava*; — consecration of a purohita.

The 7 Havir-Yajñas

The seven Vedic sacrifices which are made by the householder; these are mentioned in the wedding ceremony during the *sapta padi* rite and are as follows:—

- *Agni-ādhāna – Agnyādheya* (iṣṭhi) — The rite of setting up the sacrificial program for the first time after marriage. Lasts for 2 days. Day 1 is called *Upasad* — preliminaries performed. Day 2 the main ritual. There are 4 priests, 3 fires and *agni-manthana*. First the gārhapatya agni is lit and from this the āhavanīya is lit and the gārhapatya. Offerings of ghee and caru are made.
- *Agni-hotra* — Twice daily rite in which fresh milk is offered. The milk is heated and then allowed to cool. Morning offerings are made to Sūrya and Prajāpati, evening offerings to Agni and Prajāpati.
- *Darśa-pūrṇamāsa* (New and Full Moon rites) — performed over 2 days, requires 4 priests. Preliminaries performed on the Full or New Moon day (*upavasatha*) and the main rite on the *pratipada*. Offerings to the pitris are done only on *Amavāsya*. Following the *Purnima* offerings are made to Agni & Indra and Agni. Following *Amavāsya* offerings are made to Agni, Prajapati, Agni-Soma, and Indra.
- *āgrayaṇa*. — This is the celebration of the first harvest of the season. The first grains are offered into the sacred fire and thereafter used by the householder.
- Caturmasya — These are four-monthly sacrifices each marking the advent of a particular season and performed on the full-moon days. In the spring the *Vaiśvadeva* is performed, in the rainy season the *varuna-praghāsa* is done, in the autumn the *śākamedha.*
- *Nirūḍha paśu bandha* — These are four-monthly sacrifices each marking the advent of a particular season and performed on the full-moon days. In the spring the *Vaiśvadeva* is performed, in the rainy season the *varuna-praghāsa* is done, in the autumn the *śākamedha.*
- *Sautrāmaṇi* — a particular sacrifice in honor of Indra which is described in the Yajur Veda. It is said that by performing this yajña, one obtains a place in the heavenly realms. Although drinking wine is forbidden for brahmanas, this yajña involves the acceptance of wine in a manner that does not result in a brahmana's downfall.

The 7 Soma yajñas

Also known as **Kratu.** These are yāgas in which *Soma* is offered and a sacrificial post *Yūpa* is installed. They are of seven types and all include:—

a. pressing and offering Soma
b. animal sacrifice
c. chanting of sāmans

- *agniṣṭoma* — Lasts for five days and is performed annually in the spring. The others are all variant forms of the same sacrifice, there are 12 sastras and 12 stotras. This is the prakṛti for all the other soma yajñas.
- *Atayagniṣṭoma* — 13 soma libations, 13 sastras and 13 stotras additional victim for Indra
- *Uktya* — 15 storas, 15 sastras one victim of Indra and one for Agni
- *ṣoḍaśin* — modification of uktya extra sastra and stotra added in the evening libation of soma to Indra

- *vājapeya* — lasts for 17 days, 17 stotras & sastras and 17 animal sacrifices, 17 cups of Soma. There is a chariot race the distance of which is fixed by 17 successive arrow shots, 17 drummers, 17 bags of salt tied to the yūpa.
- *Atirātra* — performed over 24 hours; 29 stotras and sastras
- *Āptoryāma* — modification of atirātra 33 sastras and stotras

3. Rāṣṭriya Sacrifices — National rituals

There are sacrifices which only the ruling princes (rājanyas or kṣatriyas) may perform;-

- *aśva-medha* — performed by an emperor to attain absolution of his sins and achieve sovereignty,
- *rāja-sūya* — performed by the ruler to assert his superiority in the realm,
- *sarva-medha* — performed by one who is the sole monarch or eka-rāṭ, and who gives away in gift all his accumulated wealth,
- *puruṣa-medha* — involving symbolic human sacrifice (there is no evidence that *actual* human sacrifice was ever performed as a part of Vedic sacrifices.)
- *aindra-mahābhisheka* — for obtaining special energy and extraordinary qualities and
- *vājapeya* — which is meant to confer upon the performer superior strength and divinity.

The last mentioned sacrifice is permitted for Brāhmaṇas also.

gṛhya yajñas	śrauta yajñas		rāṣṭriya
pāka-yajñas	**Havir-yajñas**	**Soma-yajñas**	
Aupāsana-homaḥ	Agni-hotram	Agniṣṭomah	rājasūya
Vaiśva-devam	darśa-pūrṇamāsau	Atyagniṣṭomah	aśvamedha
Pārvanam	āgrayaṇam	Ukthyah	rājasūya
Aṣṭakā	Cātumasyāni	ṣoḍaśī	sarva-medha
Māsi-śrāddham	Nirūḍa-paśu-bandhaḥ	Vājapeyaḥ	puruṣa-medha
Sarpabaliḥ	Sautrāmaṇī	Atirātraḥ	aindra-mahābhiṣeka
īśānabaliḥ	Piṇḍa-pitri-yajñaḥ	Āptoryāmaḥ	vājapeya

Primary (*prakṛti*) and Secondary (*vikṛti*) yāgas

Another method of classifying sacrifices is to divide them into primary (*prakṛti-yāga*) and secondary (*vikṛti-yāga*). The 'prototype' or 'model' sacrifices in each of the groups mentioned above, gives rise to derived and elaborated or adapted forms.

In a **prakṛti-yāga** (basic prototype) all the aṅgas (parts) are clearly described.

In **vikṛti-yāga** only the special aṅgas (*viśeṣāṅgas*) for specific rituals are mentioned, leaving the other details to be borrowed from the *prakṛti-yāga* on the principle of extended application (*atideśa*).

Agniṣṭoma, for instance, is the 'primary 'or 'model' sacrifice for all soma-yāgas. It is an *'ekāha'* (lasting for one day). In this sacrifice the udgātṛ and his three associate priests sing in all twelve *'Stotras'* (viz. the Sāman chants); after each *Strotra* singing, the hotṛ and his three associates recite a Śastra-mantra (viz. the ṛks). The oblations are offered three times: morning (*prātas-savana*), with the chanting of the bahiṣpavamāna-stotra, at noon (*madhyāndina-savana*) with the four prastha-Stotras and the arbha-pavamāna-stator and in the evening (*trtīya-savana*), when the agniṣṭoma-Sāma is chanted. The last Sāma gives the sacrifice its name.

Thus a total of twelve Stotras will be chanted during the three savanas. If, in addition to the above twelve, three uktha-Stotras (as also the Śastra-mantras) are chanted the sacrifice becomes a 'derived one' (vikṛti), known as Ukthya. And when another stotra-mantra is added to the ukthya. the sacrifice which *is* also a 'derived one' will be known as *'ṣoḍasī'* (ie. having sixteen stotra-Śastras) In another 'derived' sacrifice called *'ati-rātra'*, these sixteen stotra-Śāstras will be supplemented with an additional twelve stotra-Śāstras, thus totalling 28 (according to the Aitareya recension, however, the total would be 30) The sacrifice is called *'ati-rātra'* because the rituals are continued throughout the night.

With agniṣṭoma as the prototype, we have *ukthya, atyagni-ṣṭoma, ṣoḍaśi, vājapeya, atirātra* and *āptoryāma* as 'derived' or alternate forms (*vikṛti*). Among them *atyagniṣṭoma, vājapeya* and *āptoryāma* have not been performed for a long time. Some other sacrifices which are well-known are *aśva-medha, rāja-sūya, pauṇḍarīka, mahā-vrata, sarvatomukha, brhaspati-sava, abhijit* and *āṅgirasa*.

1. Yāga — offering of suitable substances to the Devas lasting three or more days.

2. Homa — simple offering of oblations. These are classified as of two kinds;

- **tiṣṭhad** [*yajati*][4] which is performed standing and accompanied by the exclamation of 'vasaṭ' and
- **upaviṣṭa** [*juhoti*] performed in a seated posture accompanied by the exclamation of 'svāhā'.



[4] The verb *yajati* — "he offers" and the *juhoti* which means the same thing in English refer to the two different types of offering – either standing or sitting.

YAJÑĀYUDHA

Implements of Sacrifice

The vessels or utensils and implements used in a yajña are collectively called '*yajñāyudha'* (lit. 'the weapons used in yajña') and are mostly made from wood.

There is a story in Aitareya- Brāhmaṇa (34, 1) that explains —

> In the beginning Prajāpati created yajña, and consequently **brahma** (the priestly functions or spiritual sovereignty) and **kṣatra** (the temporal sovereignty) came into being. (Owing to some reason), the yajña fled from them, but they pursued the yajña, with their own weapons. Now what were the weapons of brāhma (or the priests) ? The utensils and implements used in the yajña. And the weapons of kṣatra (or the princes) were horses, chariots, armours, arrows and bows.
>
> When the kṣatra pursued the yajña with its weapons of warfare, the yajña ran faster, being scared, and the kṣatra had to return without catching up with the yajña. But the brāhma pursuing it was successful: it reached the yajña and prevented its further flight. Yajña, however, looked at the 'weapons' that the brahma carried, and recognised them as its own 'weapons'; it consented to stay with the brāhma.
>
> This is how the yajña has settled down with the priestly class. The princelings approached the priests and desired also to possess yajña for their own benefit. The priests thereupon counselled them to put aside their weapons of warfare and approach the yajña as priests with its own 'weapons' (viz. the yajñāyudha) The princelings accordingly cast aside their weapons of warfare and assumed the form of priests, carrying the priestly weapons and obtained the yajña.

1. Kapāla

Small thin clay saucers round in shape on which the *puroḍāśa* cakes are baked for offering.

Puroḍāśa is prepared by taking four fist-fulls of paddy which are cleaned in a wicker basket (*nirvāpa*), it is then pounded (*avaghāta*), husked, and ground; it mixed with water and laid flat on the kapāla in the shape of a tortoise (viz circular in shape). The *kapāla* is placed on the fire, and the *puroḍāśa* is baked.

The baked puroḍāśa is stored in a container called *'īḍa'*. While making oblations, clarified butter (ājya) is poured on the cakes.

Different gods are presented with puroḍāśa.-offerings separately on kapālas. Texts prescribe the number of kapālas for each god: Varuṇa, for example, is eligible for one kapāla, the Aśvins two kapālas, Viṣṇu three, Agni eight, Agna-vaiṣṇava (Agni and Viṣṇu together) eleven, and Agna-śomiya (Agni and Soma together) also eleven.

2. Śūrpa



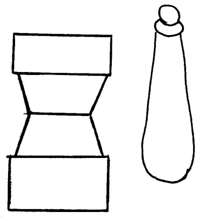
Flat winnowing basket square in shape with two corners on one side rounded off, for holding the grains. This is used for cleaning the grains before they are ground and powdered.

3. Kṛṣṇājina

The black antelope's hide used for the sacrificer to sit upon, and for the mortar (*ulūkhala*) and pestle (*musala*) for pounding grain to be placed on. It also figures during the consecration (*dīkṣā*) of the sacrificer in soma-yāga.

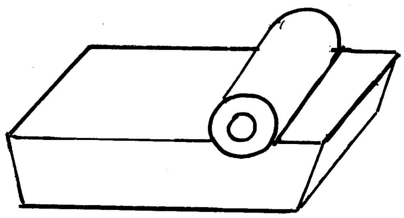
4. Ulūkhala & 5. Musala

A wooden mortar and pestle used for pounding the grains or crushing soma shoots



6. Dṛṣad & 7. Upala

Dṛṣad is a large stone slab (*paṭṭah*) on which are placed the soma-creepers, to be crushed or ground (*peśaṇārtha*) with the help of *upala*. It is also called a *grāva*.



The *upala* also called *adri*, it is a smaller elongated mill-stone resting on the dṛṣad; it is used for crushing or grinding the soma-creeper, placed on the *dṛṣad*. These two are used in the soma-rituals, and also for pounding the grains for the puroḍāśa-cakes.

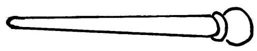
8. Sphya

A wooden sword used for cutting the darbha-grass to the required size, for marking the lines in the sacrificial ground and for stirring the boiled oblations, removing the surface soil viz. removing the upper layer of mud, digging the earth and marking the area of the altar.



9. Śamyā

A wooden peg or, stick or staff, shaped like a mace.
It is a measuring device, used along with sphya.

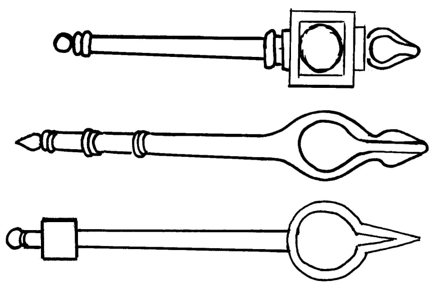


LADLES

The most common ladles used in yajña for oblating liquids are sruk and sruva.

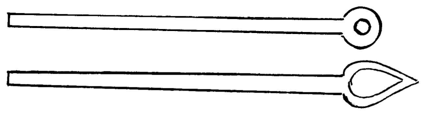
Sruk

Sruk is a long ladle, a bāhu (36 aṅgulas), an aratni (24 aṅgulas) or a pradeśa (12 aṅgulas) in length, made of a sacrificial wood. It has a bowl or depression (*puṣkara*) on top of it at one end with a beak (Shaped like elephant's lips or swan's beak) for the liquid to be poured out (*prasecana*); the tail portion of the ladle (or handle) will be in the form of crow's tail (*vāyasa-puchha*).



The Sruk represents the female principle or Prakṛti.

Sruva

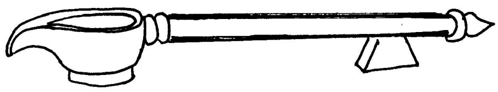


Sruva is a smaller ladle used for offering liquids. It is an aratni (24 aṅgulas) in length, and the bowl (puṣkara) is a small one, its diameter being not more than the tip of the thumb of the sacrificer's hand.

The Sruva represents puruṣa or the male principle.

Vasordhārā

A variety of ladle (which means 'the flow of wealth') used in Agni-chāyana and is meant for continuous and uninterrupted offering of melted clarified butter (*ājya*) into the fire for a specific duration (represented by the chanting of the mantras).



VESSELS

Praṇīta



The Praṇīta is a wooden vessel in which consecrated water is kept. While making puroḍāśas, water from this vessel is mixed with the flour. The vessel is also meant to store soma-juice. The vessel is square in shape.

Prokṣaṇī



The Prokṣaṇī is the vessel has a depression shaped like a lotus-leaf (*padma-patrākrti*) or lotus-bud (*kamalāmukulākrti*). It holds the holy water, used for consecrating (*prokṣaṇam*, — aspertion) the articles and the oblations. Into the water are dropped the darbha blades (Saccharum cylindricum) to make the water holy.

Droṇa-Kalaśa

This is a large vessel made of strong and hard wood like vāraṇa or vikankata for storing the soma-juice; it is a trough (droṇa), square or circular in shape, with a handle (daṇḍa-yuta). It may alternately be shaped like a boat (naukākara).

Daśāpavitra

The device to strain the soma-juice. It is a fringed strainer, made from a piece of cotton cloth to which in the centre is attached or woven a round piece of woollen cloth. This is placed on the droṇa-kalaśa and Soma-juice is poured into it; the strained soma-juice collects in the droṇa-kalaśa.

Grahas

The nine wooden cups which contain the soma-juice are made in various shapes, but generally, they resemble the form of a hour-glass, a span high, but narrow in the middle.



Camasas

These are the soma-offering cups. Ten of these cups are mentioned, one for each of the priests who offer soma-juice as oblation. Their shapes differ so that the cup meant for the priest is easily identified. They are generally square in shape and have handles.

Sthāli

Various kinds of clay bowls. Agnihotra-sthāli which holds the fresh milk (*go-dohana*) is prescribed to be made by the hand of the sacrificer or one of the officiating priests. Ājya-sthāli is for holding the ghee; likewise there are caru-sthāli, dhruva-sthāli and āgrayaṇa-sthāli.

Śapha

The tongs (two of them, *śaphau*) are also made of udumbara wood and are shaped like claws; they are long in shape and meant only to hold the mahāvīra vessel.

Araṇis



The fire that is used in the sacrifice must be produced by friction of sticks of the aśvattha tree (Ficus religiosa) which has grown in close association with the śami tree (Prosopis spicigera or Mimosa suma). Both these trees are invested with great spiritual significance; śami especially is regarded as the 'mother of fire'. The tree called araṇika (Premna spinosa) is also mentioned as suitable for this purpose. The expression 'araṇi' suggests the process of producing fire by 'turning round' (or by 'fitting one stick into another', viz. the stick-and-groove method). The fire may be produced by friction or contrition, by rubbing one stick over another, or by a simple apparatus such as the fire-drill. All references are to two araṇi's which are described as the two mothers of Agni, who is 'dvimātr' ("having two mothers", Rig- Veda, 1;31; 2); the symbolism is of the two births of Agni, who is 'dvi-janma' ('born twice'), one in the heavens and the other on earth. The lower araṇi signifies the female aspect, while the upper one is male. The kindling of fire is thus an act of procreation.

Miscellaneous Implements

Upaveśa

The stick, which is used to stir the fire — shaped like an extended palm (hastākṛti)

Dhāvitra

The fan used to fan the fire. It consists of a stick of bamboo to which is fastened a piece of black antelope's hide.

Mekṣaṇa

This is a rice-stirring spatula also used for offering oblations to the manes. It is either made of sacrificial wood or metal.

āsandi

A high throne upon which the Soma creepers are stacked in the yāga-śāla after purchase (soma-vikraya). Soma, the philosophical concept as well as the actual creeper, play an important role in yajña. Soma is regarded as 'rāja' — the monarch and is thus installed upon the throne. During the coronation ritual, the earthly ruler imitates Indra, the lord of the celestial beings and is seated upon a wooden throne called *āsandi* and is duly consecrated. The āsandi used for the soma-creepers is thus called rājāsandi. It is placed at the southern side of the āhavanīya kuṇḍa. It is made of udumbara wood (ficus glomerata), the four legs of the seat as high as the sacrificer's navel (*'nabhi-daghnah pādāni*) and the portion above being an aratni (viz. 24 aṅgulas) high (*aratni-matrani śirṣāni'*). The seat is prepared by muñja-grass ropes (Saccharum sara). It is covered by black antelope's skin (kṛṣṇājina). A slightly taller *āsandi*, known as *samrāḍ-āsandi*, is placed to the east or north of *rājāsandi*; and on this are kept the *mahāvīrā* pots, the *upayamani* ladle and other articles.

Kūrca

"Kūrca" strictly means a bunch of kuśa-grass (Poa cynosuroides). But the kūrca used in a sacrificial ritual is a small elongated plate made of kuśa-grass made in the shape of a tortoise (kurma), or dolphin (makara). It is kept on the western side of the āhavanīya hearth; and the sacrificial ladles (sruca) when not used are placed upon it.

Yūpa



In sacrifices where animals are killed, the *yūpa* (sacrificial stake) is used. It is a pillar carved out of khadira wood (Acacia catechu), bilva wood (Aegle marmelos), palāśa (Butea frondosa), aśvattha wood (Ficus religiosa), udumbara wood (Ficus glomerata) or kramuka wood (Areca faubel). The height of the yūpa varies according to the yajña.

The base of the yupa is one aratni in height and is buried underground; this part may also be equipped with an iron ring called *yūpa-kaṭaka*. The yūpa may either be cylindrical in shape or square or it may be octagonal. The yūpa is so called because the sacrificial animal is fastened to it. One top of the yūpa is a detachable mount made of wood or prepared out of wheat flour called *'caśāla'*. The yūpa represents the Axis Mundi or centre of the universe.


Sruk


Sruva


Upaveśa


Sphya

YĀGA-ŚĀLĀ — The Sacrificial Pavillion

The yajña is where all the gods reside; the pavilion in which the yajña is conducted represents the empire of Indra and the golden throne of Agni, the pleasure-grove of Soma and the place of rest for Varuna. It is the nave of the earth.

The altar on which the sacrifice is conducted is known as the '**vedi**'. It is consecrated ground, where ritualistic cleaning, digging and other details of construction are carried out.

The Vedic yāga-śālas are laid out differently according to each yajña. One of the basic designs is that of the Darśa-pūrṇamāsa. The only yajñas which are not done in a pavillion with a roof covering are those done for the dead — cremations and associated ceremonies.

The Layout of Fire-Places and Altar (B) 19

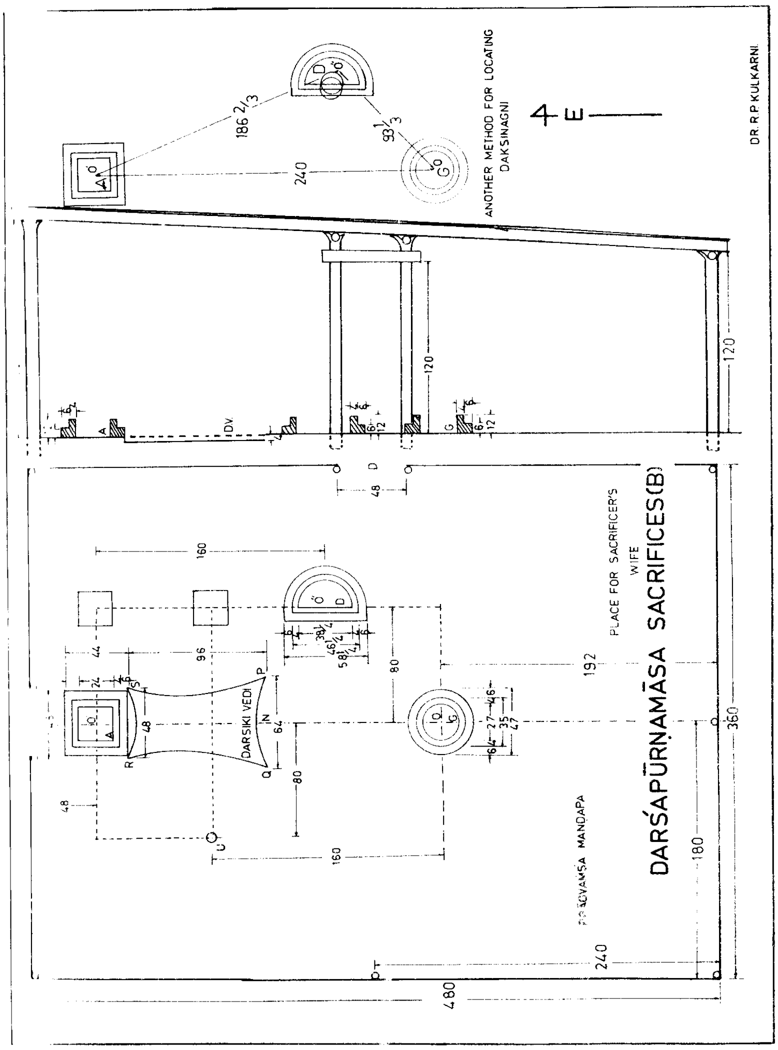


PLATE 1B (Scale 0. 4 mm = 1 Aṅg)

Modern Yāga-śālās are usually quite simple and are based upon the Tantric model rather than the Vedic one. Most Āgamic temples in India have a dedicated yāga-śālā, and temporary ones are constructed as per the requirement of the ceremony.



Āgamic yāga-śālā for a mahā-yajña

DAKṢIṆA – HONORARIUM

(Sacrificial Fee)

Dakṣina is said to be the wife of Yajña — the two can never be separated and so a yajña without the giving of Dakṣiṇa is fruitless.

Giving Dakshina to the priests is an act of generosity (dāna) which is integral to all religious ceremonies. Through giving dakṣina one is supporting the priests who in turn are the upholders and the teachers of the Dharma. It is upon the householders that the priests and the monks depend for their livelihood and ability to continue their work of teaching and promoting the values of Sanātana Dharma. Householders should express their heartfelt love of the Dharma and appreciation of the work of the priests and gurus through giving generously according to their financial means.

1. Now they injure the yajña, whenever they perform it; actually when they press out the Soma they injure it; when they suffocate the victim they kill it; and with the mortar and the pestle they injure the grain offering (when they pound it).

2. Having been injured in this way the yajña was no longer vigorous. By means of *dakṣinas* it is invigorated; hence the name *dakṣina* is derived from the root *dakṣay* 'to invigorate'. Whatever failing there may be in yajña, that is invigorated by gifts to the officiating priests. Then only does the yajña become successful; for this reason the yajamān must make gifts to the priests.

3. Now at the havir yajña indeed the fee is 6 or 12 cows, but no Soma sacrifice should have dakṣinas of less than a hundred (cows).

4. Now truly there are two kinds of gods. The devas are the heavenly gods, and the learned brāhmaṇas are the earthly gods. And the sacrifice to the gods is twofold, oblations being the yajña to the devas and the dakṣina is the yajña to the earthly gods (*Bhūsura*), the brāhmaṇas versed in sacred lore. These two kinds of gods when gratified convey the yajamāna to the heavenly world.

5. It is indeed to the officiating priests that the dakṣina belongs; for they prepare for the yajamāna another identity; — the yajña becomes his identity in the other world. Considering the priests to have regenerated him (in a spiritual sense) the yajamāna should give gifts to the officiating but not to the non-officiating priests.

6. Now there are four kinds of dakṣina to the priests; gold (money), cows, cloth and horses.

śatapatha brāhmaṇa; iv khāṇḍa 3 adhyāya 4 brāhmaṇa

Dakṣiṇa however little it may be should always be given to the brāhmins and the devotees during the performance of yajñas, because any religious activity that is performed without sacrificial fees becomes fruitless and vain. Therefore a yajamāna should give according to his means with faith and devotion because dakṣina is a segment of the yajña. (Pancarātra - Pādma Samhita 11;267 - 269.)

